

# **YOGA**

## **A WAY OF LIFE**

**Swamini Satyavratana Sarawati**

**Contents**

1.	The Concept of Yoga	4
2.	Salutations to Patanjali Maharshi	4
3.	The meaning of Yoga	5
4.	Five Levels of Human Existence	7
5.	Reference from Taittiriya Upanishad	9
6.	The Science of Illness	10
7.	What is disease?	11
8.	Yogic Diet and Practical hints for Health	13
9.	Prayer, a two-way communication between you and God	18
10.	An Overview of Patanjali Yoga Sutras	22
11.	Significance of Suryanamaskara	34
12.	Yogic practices for comprehensive growth of personality	39
13.	An overview of the Asanas Prescribed by Sage Patanjali	42
14.	Pranayama, Regulation of breath	50
15.	Pratyahara, withdrawal of sense organs	55
16.	Dharana, concentration of mind	57
17.	Dhyana, the art of Meditation	60
18.	Samadhi, the absorption	64

**FORWARD**

Practice of Astanga Yoga, with the background of vedic vision, brings gradual transformation in ones personality at the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual level. This book is an attempt to make the reader to understand the eight steps prescribed by Patanjali Maharshi for a fit body, healthy sense organs, subtle mind and a sharp intellect. All of these help him to understand the subtle Truth.

‘Yoga, a way of life’ – has been published as a series in the monthly magazine Star teller (a division of Express Newspapers Pvt. Ltd.) in the year 2009-10 and had received an overwhelming response from readers.

It has been my constant endeavour to spread the real essence and multifold benefits of Yoga Sastra, and writing this book is a major step towards this goal. As a yoga teacher myself, I have always made my students to understand that the ultimate purpose of Ashtanga yoga practice is for physical, mental and spiritual health, so that a person is fit to receive scriptural teaching which ultimately leads to moksha.

**Swamini Satyavratana Sarawati**

## THE CONCEPT OF YOGA

Today, Yoga is taken seriously, as it has been globally accepted to bring multi-fold benefits to the mind, body and soul. Yoga is undoubtedly a boon to the diseased people, a fashion of the day for common people, a spiritual dimension for yogis, who want to reach higher levels of spirituality and for professionals to reap its rich fruits. It is fascinating that this science which has come down to us from the *Iswara (God)* Himself through the Rishis, has no barriers of caste, religion, country or continent and is spreading in spite of advancements in the field of science and medicine.

Let this article and subsequent ones help you explore the real essence of Yoga through right understanding, which will finally help you see yourself and the Universe from a different perspective that is truly spiritual.

Currently, the whole concern of the world is on two main problems: (1) stress and (2) pollution. It is a known fact that when people get a disease, they try different medicines before coming to Yoga for a solution. This statement is just an illustration to show the limitations of different medical fields in eliminating diseases. It is Yoga that can correctly diagnose the disease and prescribe the right remedy. Therefore, doctors do recognize the importance of Yoga and advice patients to do Yoga, which is the gate way to good health.

## SALUTATIONS TO PATANJALI MAHARSHI

This prayer is a salutation to the great Maharshi Patanjali who is the compiler of *Yoga Sutras*.

योगेन चित्तस्य पदेन वाचां मलं शरीरस्य च वैद्यकेन ।  
योऽपाकरोत्तं प्रवरं मुनीनां पतञ्जलिं प्राञ्जलिरानतोऽस्मि ॥

## Yoga-A way of life

“I offer my salutations with folded hands to Patanjali, the renowned amongst the sages, who removed the impurity of mind through yoga, of the speech by Grammar and of the body by Ayurveda”.

It is mandatory to salute Patanjali Maharshi at the beginning of every Yoga session as he profounded the *Yoga Sutras*, which is a collection of 195 sutras and this has come down to us from posterity. He has also prescribed the elimination of impurities at three levels (1) At the mental level— By practising Ashtanga Yoga (2) At the verbal level— By learning Sanskrit, which is an ancient Indian language and the language of the *Devas* and finally (3) At the body level— By following Ayurveda, to eliminate diseases.

### THE MEANING OF YOGA

युज्यते अनेन इति योगः

युज् - to unite - the individual self and Total self

Yoga is a means by which the individual Self, ‘Jeevatma’ can merge with the ‘Paramatma’, who is the Total.

### Invaluable quotes from the Shastras to support the concept of yoga

1. योगः चित्त वृत्ति निरोधः (“*Control of the mind is called yoga*”, Patanjali Maharshi)

He defines Yoga as restraining one’s own mind, or channelizing the mind to understand the *Real Being*. Here, controlling should not be misunderstood as suppression of thoughts, which is wrongly put across by many people.

2. मनः प्रशमन उपायः (“*Yoga is a technique to calm down the mind*”, Vashistha Maharshi)

## Yoga-A way of life

Vashista Maharshi, the guru of Sri Rama, has envisioned that people on this earth would be under stress and has therefore stated this sutra many centuries ago. Hence, the best solution to calm down the mind is to follow the principle of “*Simple living and high thinking*” and practice Ashtanga Yoga sincerely.

### 3. योगः कर्मसु कौशलम् (“*Skill in action is called Yoga*”, Lord Krishna)

This sloka is from Bhagavad Gita where in Lord Krishna gives Self- knowledge to Arjuna at the battle field. Lord Krishna asks Arjuna to use his skill of archery in action at the right time which is Yoga itself. This quote should not be misinterpreted, as some people use their skills for destructive purposes as we see today. Here, it means that we have to make our life meaningful and purposeful in a constructive way and that itself is Yoga in practice in real life.

### 4. समत्वम् योग उच्यते – (“*Equanimity of the mind is called Yoga*”, Lord Krishna)

Equanimity, balanced state of mind is a trade mark of a true yogi. Controlling the fluctuating mind is the most difficult task for many people. It is often said that the “*Mind is like a monkey*” and to control it is a Herculean task. Therefore, it is only through the practice of Yoga can one attain a relaxed, harmonious and healthy mind.

Lastly, it is very essential that if we want to get full benefit of this great science, and unfold this treasure given to us by the ancient seers, we have to learn from a dedicated guru who has the right knowledge of yoga and spiritual texts; from the *guru-shishya parampara* and also practicing and teaching Yoga. When

## **Yoga-A way of life**

we totally surrender with faith and devotion to such a guru, everything will fall in its place automatically.

### **Five Levels of Human Existence**

Everybody wants to enjoy good health to be happy ultimately. Health is defined by World Health Organization (*WHO*) as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity. WHO also suggests a fourth dimension, i.e. *spiritual well being*. To understand this spiritual health is to understand our real self (*I* or *Aham*), which is *Ananda Swaroopam* or *Brahma Swaroopam*. No doubt, it is also the central idea of our Vedic culture.

To experience happiness, we not only need to understand the yogic concept of human existence or the five Sheaths that surrounds us, through which we interact with things, objects and people, but also have to work towards keeping them healthy. *Taittiriya Upanishad* elaborates on these for an all round personality and to reach our final goal i.e. *Ananda* which is eternal.

Below is the illustration of the five levels of human existence.

- 1. Annamaya Kosha -Physical Sheath**
- 2. Pranamaya Kosha -Vital Sheath**
- 3. Manomaya Kosha - Astral Sheath**
- 4. Vijnanamaya Kosha -Wisdom Sheath**
- 5. Anandamaya Kosha -Happiness Sheath**

The outer layer or Sheath is the *Annamaya Kosha*, which is made up of *Annam* or food that we eat. This is the gross physical body which experiences pain and pleasure. We can keep this

## Yoga-A way of life

layer healthy, by practising the *asanas* prescribed in *Ashtanga Yoga*.

Subsequently, there is something more important than the physical Sheath, which makes us different from a corpse. This is the *Pranamaya Kosha* or the Vital Sheath. This layer is very subtle and is powerful as electricity, as it is vital for our body. We can keep this Sheath healthy, by doing *Pranayama* daily.

However, insects, plants, birds and animals also have a physical body with *prana*, but human beings are superior to them. This is because of the mind or the *Manomaya Kosha* or Astral Sheath, which is even more subtle as it enables us to think and differentiate. As it can be experienced only by oneself, this faculty makes human beings unique. This layer can be kept healthy by doing *japa*, meditation and possessing the right attitude and perception towards life.

Then, we know that acts of eating, sleeping, fear and procreation are common to human beings as well as animals. But we claim ourselves to be the crown of this creation than other beings, because of our intellect i.e the Intellectual body or *Vijnanamaya Kosha*. It is this discriminating capacity which differentiates normal beings with the ‘mentally-challenged’ people. This layer can be enriched by the right understanding of our scriptures.

Finally, it is for happiness that man toils day and night, which is the *Anandamaya Kosha* or Experiential Happiness. Our *Shastras* says that if one keeps all the four layers healthy, by following the principles and disciplines of *Ashtanga Yoga*, the study of Vedanta is a walkover, through which this *sadhaka* discovers his /her true nature, which is the true *Ananda*.



## Yoga-A way of life

### Reference from Taittiriya Upanishad



To support the above diagram, we have an illustration from the Vedas. Bhrigu, a young boy approaches his father Varuna and asks him “*Oh! Father, who is that Brahman, the principal Atman?*” Varuna tells him to do tapas or enquiry, in order to get the answer. Bhrigu starts his enquiry and realizes that the body is *Brahman*, because all beings exist because of *the body*. He goes and tells this to his father who turns him down, as *Brahman* is infinite and imperishable unlike the body. The boy then forgets the gross body and focuses on the *Prana*. He returns and tells his father that *Prana* is Brahman, as all beings depend on *Prana* for survival. His father refuses his finding and asks him to go back and to do further enquiry. After years of enquiry, he comes back and tells his father that the mind is *Brahman*. But his father tells him that the mind is an inert entity and it cannot be *Brahman*. Then, the boy goes back and uses his intellect to understand about all that exists. He returns and tells his father that *Vijnana* is *Brahman*, but his father tells him that *Vijnana* too has its limitation and sends him back to the forest to seek the true *Brahman*. Finally, the boy forgets all the four layers and contemplates deeper and deeper, till he discovers Brahman which is the *Existence Consciousness Infinite Principle as his true nature*. This is what one must aim at finally in life—the union of the *Jeevatma (individual Self)* with *Parmatma (Total Self)*,

## Yoga-A way of life

which is true *Ananda* or happiness. To conclude, we can claim that Yoga:

- a) is undoubtedly the answer to all mental and physical ailments prevalent in the Universe
- b) there is no other science equivalent to Yoga.
- c) it can also help us to invoke the right *guna* (*Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*) at the appropriate time and enable us to lead a healthy life.

It is important that it has to be learnt from a knowledgeable guru and not from other sources, which give haphazard information. A traditional guru alone can unfold the scriptures,

by which one attains Self Knowledge i.e. knowing -his/her true nature, which is beyond all the five layers.

### The Science of Illness

The intrinsic desire of every human being on this Earth is to attain moksha or sukha-prapthi. For this, it is essential that one puts the right effort to achieve it. Just as a student desirous of becoming a doctor or an engineer has to put in a lot of hard work to gain his/her degree, for a sincere seeker who is longing for ananda, it is inevitable that he/she understands the Shastras properly and follows certain techniques prescribed in them. We should also realize that our body is a means or vehicle (*jeeva yatra sadhana*) and it should be kept healthy and fit, till we get Jnana Prapti. This has been beautifully brought out through an analogy in Kathopanishad. The body is compared to a chariot. The intellect (*Buddhi*) is the driver of this body chariot and the mind is the rein, the sense organs are like the horses of the chariot. Therefore, if I have to reach my destination safely, the mind must be able to keep all the sense organs reasonably under control. When this fails, the body loses its balance and crashes

## Yoga-A way of life

down. In addition, the most intelligent person in this universe is the one who knows the importance of his/her body as a means to attain liberation, which is the ultimate goal of human life. He serves the society and remains unaffected, under all circumstances like a lotus leaf floating on water.

### What is disease?

We all know that disease is the antonym for health. We can define disease as a state when a person is not at ease, because of certain imbalance at any of the five layers of human existence. We have already seen in the previous lesson that W.H.O (*World Health Organization*) claims that a person is healthy, only when he/she is free from disease at the physical, emotional, intellectual and social levels. So it is important to know about health and the cause of different ailments.

When Sri Rama asked his guru Vashista Maharshi about disease, the Maharshi said that the mind is the cause of all diseases. To understand the cause and remedy of different types of diseases, we have to know about them from the scriptural vision, so that we can work towards maintaining good health.

The diagram above clearly illustrates that the diseases are of two main categories- Adhijaha and Anadhijaha. Adhijaha diseases are connected with the mind and can be sub-divided into Sara (*essential type of disease*), which is the cycle of birth and death, from which no one can escape. The other is Samanya (*ordinary type of disease*), arising due to mental or emotional imbalance caused by interactions with objects and people. The Shastras have also given us suitable remedies for these diseases. For the former (*Sara type of disease*), the only remedy is to take the path of Jnana Yoga, by studying the scriptures. This will help us discover our true Self (*Atma Swaropa*). For the latter (*Samanya type of disease*), we need to practise Ashtanga Yoga

## Yoga-A way of life

and lead a positive healthy life with a right attitude. Today doctors too recommend Yoga, as it has the power to control the mind, which is the cause of all stress related diseases like diabetes, asthma, ulcer, and blood pressure and many more.... These so called psychosomatic diseases are first born in the Manomaya Kosha and cause mental agitation. It then percolates to the Pranamaya Kosha, where it causes a haphazard flow of prana, which leads to over palpitation and it finally attacks the Annamaya Kosha in the form of under digestion (*Ajirnatvam*), over digestion (*Atijirnatvam*) or wrong digestion (*Kujirnatvam*). At this level, the doctor diagnoses it as a disease and suggests medicines accordingly for the whole life span. Therefore Ashtanga Yoga alone can keep our body, prana and mind in a fit condition through asanas, pranayama and meditations respectively, thus helping us lead a healthy life. We have to remember this watch- word at all times: “*No Yoga, No Peace; Know Yoga, Know Peace*”.

The second category of disease called Anadhijaha is caused due to virus in the environment and affects us at the physical level. Malaria, Smallpox, Chickenpox, Typhoid and so on can be cured by taking the right kind of medicine. There is no doubt that a person can develop resistance to disease by practising Ashtanga Yoga, eating a yogic diet and leading a stress-free life with a positive attitude.

The old adage ‘A sound mind in a sound body’ still holds good today, if we want to lead a happy, peaceful and purposeful life. We also need to do a lot of karma yoga and serve humanity at large. In addition, it is essential to have an association with noble people and develop devotion towards the religion we follow. Finally, yoga ought to become our life style and the relentless urge to reach highest human goal through the study of scriptures should be our bedrock. Once we discover our true

## Yoga-A way of life

nature as Existent, Consciousness and Infinite principle (*Sat-Chit-Ananda*), then the purpose of human life (*Purnatvam*) is accomplished.

**What is tasty for the tongue may not be a good diet for the body. In addition, the tongue is a powerful sense organ. It has two important functions, to talk and to eat. If one can control the talking tongue and the eating tongue, we can be free from many diseases.**

### Yogic Diet and Practical hints for Health

Our health largely depends on the discipline of our diet. Our body is a mere reflection of the food we consume and the thoughts we nurture. Therefore to be free from illness, we need to know what to eat, how to eat, when to eat, how often to eat, how much to eat and some basic etiquette related to food habits. In addition, we also need to know some *slokas* from our *shastras* that authenticate the stance on the food habits mentioned below.

### What to eat?

Patanjali Maharshi, the father of *Yoga Shastras* had laid down ten *Yamas* or Universal Values that everyone needs to follow to remain healthy. The first value is *Ahimsa* or non-violence. So it goes without saying that non-vegetarian food is prohibited and should not be included in our diet. But people take non-vegetarian food because they have the misconception that vegetarian food is not nutritious and does not provide any strength to the body. However, from the examples in nature, we see that all hefty and strong animals like the Hippopotamus and the Elephant are herbivorous. Moreover, according to our *shastras*, killing animals to satisfy one's belly is a grievous and unpardonable sin.

## Yoga-A way of life

### Suggestions about food from our scriptures

- Vegetables, honey, milk, curd, fruits, nuts, sprouts and greens are some acceptable food items. All these are *sattvic* food that do not stimulate the sense organs
- Hard vegetables need to be cooked and soft vegetables need to be steamed and eaten as bland as possible
- Pungent and spicy food with garlic and onions are not at all recommended
- Food has to be prepared with very little salt and without any spicy ingredients
- Coffee and tea are banned, as they are unhealthy and its over- consumption is equivalent to alcohol or tobacco addiction
- Fried foods to be totally avoided
- Take plenty of water

We must always bear in mind that what is tasty for the tongue may not be good for the body. In addition, the tongue is a powerful sense organ. It has two important functions, to talk and to eat. If one can control the talking tongue and the eating tongue, we can be free from many illnesses.

जिते रसं जिते सर्वं

*“By disciplining the tongue, all other sense organs also get disciplined.”*

Besides, we should also understand the practical implication of this quote, *“EAT TO LIVE AND NOT LIVE TO EAT.”* When we live to eat, our life span will reduce drastically. Early death is a common scenario these days. Therefore let our diet be our doctor that will enable us to remain healthy as long as we live.

## Yoga-A way of life

### How to eat?

Many take it as a culinary art to prepare half-cooked rice and vegetables. We must know that it is harmful to eat such food, however tasty it may be prepared. We must also learn to drink solids and eat liquids.

It is essential that we

- smash the food properly into a liquid, before eating
- munch the food well
- eat slowly without haste
- drink water, an hour after meal
- always chant the following *slokas* before eating

### Pray, before you start eating

अन्न पूर्णे सदा पूर्णे शङ्कर प्राण वल्लभे ।  
ज्ञान वैराग्य सिद्ध्यर्थं भिक्षांदेहि च पार्वति ॥

*“Oh! Goddess of food, Annapurne! You are a symbol of plentitude, and the dear consort of Lord Shiva. May you give food for the purposes of gaining dispassion and knowledge!”*

ब्रह्मार्पणं ब्रह्म हविर्ब्रह्माग्नौ ब्रह्मणाहुतम् ।  
ब्रह्मैव तेन गन्तव्यं ब्रह्मकर्म समाधिना ॥ (B. G 4.24)

*“The ladle is Brahman. The offering is Brahman. It is offered into the fire of Brahman, by Brahman. Brahman alone is to be reached by him who sees Brahman in every action.”*

अन्नं ब्रह्म रसो विष्णुः भोक्ता देवो मदेश्वरः ।  
इति सच्चिन्त्य भुञ्जाना अन्न दोषैर्नलिप्यते ॥

## Yoga-A way of life

*“The food is Lord Brahman (the Creator), the taste in the food is Lord Vishnu (the Sustainer), and the one who consumes is Lord Shiva (the Dissolution Principle).”*

The one who eats with this attitude will be free from the impurities of the food.

### When to eat?

It is important that we should

- eat only when we are hungry
- Keep our morning breakfast –light, afternoon lunch–intermediate and dinner – light again.

### How often to eat?

There is a prevalent belief that one needs to eat in short intervals, to prevent certain diseases. This is again erroneous. We unnecessarily invite ailments, when we eat frequently and more than what is required by our body.

### How much to eat?

When we eat, we need to know the quantity of intake that is necessary for the body. It is wrong to eat till the stomach is full or till we feel sick of food.

पूरयोत् अशनेनार्थम् तृतीयं उदकेन च ।  
वायो संचरणार्थं चतुर्थमवशेषयेत् ॥

When we eat, we should

- fill ½ the stomach with food
- fill ¼ the stomach with water
- keep ¼ of the stomach empty for air to take its place for digestion.



## Yoga-A way of life

In fact, our body requires very little food to sustain itself. So we should not invite trouble by making our stomach a dustbin for the leftovers. Everyone knows quite well that over-eating leads to obesity and other related problems. Hence to remain healthy, we must be cautious and aware of the consequences of over eating.

### Some basic etiquette about food habits

Our Indian culture does not recommend fast foods that are favourites among the youth today. Eating out should be the final resort during an emergency and not a daily routine. In order to keep our Indian culture alive and pass them down to the next generation, we need to keep the following points in mind:

- Firstly, we should offer the food to God before eating. Thank God and all who have helped us to get the food.
- Secondly, we should sit down on the floor and eat our meal happily with our family. It not only provides sufficient exercise to the body, but also helps us take the right quantity of food which can be easily digested. The sitting posture also aids in the relaxation of the body, which is why buffet system was not recommended by our ancestors.
- Thirdly, we should avoid serious discussion, noise and loud laughter, while eating.
- Fourthly, we should cherish healthy thoughts and be happy, while taking our meal.
- Finally, we should cook plenty of food for others and do *anna daanam* (feeding the needy freely), if possible.

**To conclude, remember YOUR FOOD IS YOUR DOCTOR. So eat a simple *sattvic* diet, drink plenty of water,**

## Yoga-A way of life

**cultivate positive thoughts, learn yoga and meditation from a knowledgeable guru and practise them regularly. This is the gateway for a happy, healthy and harmonious life for everyone in the family and the society at large.**

### **PRAYER, A TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION BETWEEN YOU AND GOD**

PRAYER is the highest form of communication with the Lord. One may communicate with Him by talking, but prayer is superior. In prayer, we glorify the Lord through “*Stuti*” or “*Prarthana*”. Bhagavat stuti is done by chanting Slokas, Stothras, etc. We request the Lord to give us what we desire through such prayer. A prayer may be one of the many forms, a short Sloka or a big Stothra or any sort of ritual. The form of prayer, the mode of its performance may differ from person to person, religion to religion or even caste to caste. However, the fundamental inner core is the same—we want a desire to be fulfilled by the Lord.

Through prayer, a person relates himself with the Lord; the role of a person is that of a devotee. He invokes the relationship of the devotee to the Almighty. In this relationship the Lord does not impose any conditions on the devotee- it is unconditional. On the other hand, the devotee demands many things from the Lord. Moreover, the devotee recognizes that the Lord is the Creator and he himself is the ‘*Created*’. The Iswara-Jeeva relationship is firmly ingrained in his mind. He further acknowledges and firmly believes that God is Almighty, Omnipotent, Omniscient, (*sarvajñah*), All- knowing and so he can rely on Him.

### **Different types of Prayer**

A prayer may be one of three types- ‘*kayika*’, ‘*vachika*’ and ‘*manasa*’ that are physical, verbal or mental. In the physical type,

## Yoga-A way of life

one performs ‘*Pooja*’ to ‘*Ishta Devata*’, by doing ‘*Alankara*’, offering flowers, doing namaskara, pradakshina and so on. Verbal type is by chanting stothras. The Manasa type is considered as the highest form of prayer. Sri Ramana Maharishi says,

कायवाङ्मनः कार्यमुत्तमम् ।  
पूजनं जमश्चित्तनं क्रमात् ॥

Though the mental prayer is the most difficult, as no action is involved, it is the most powerful sadhana. ‘*Siva manasa pooja*’ and ‘*Devi manasa pooja*’ are some examples. Very few devotees resort to ‘*Manasa pooja*’; most of them follow either physical or verbal type of prayer.

### Results of Prayer

Any action gives a result; prayer too, being an action related to God, is bound to breed a result. We classify results (*phalam*) as two distinct types- Drishta and Adrishta, the seen and the unseen. The results which are seen or felt immediately, such as physical relaxation, mental peace, inner joy are called ‘*Drishta Phalams*’. The Adrishta results come at a later time or even in another birth (*Janma*) in the form of comfort. In general, prayer nurtures inner strength, neutralizes or dilutes the bad ‘*Prarabdha*’; a prayer is never wasted. One can go ahead in life through prayer. There may be a tendency to doubt the Lord and the efficacy of prayer, when faced with problems in spite of prayers; for this, the Lord’s response is “***You should have had a lot more problems, if you had not prayed!***” So, one should never stop the prayer.

### Different types of devotees

The purpose of prayer is explained by Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita. He speaks about four types of devotees, each seeking different results.

## Yoga-A way of life

चतुर्विधा भजन्ते मां जनाः सुकृतिनोऽर्जुन ।

आर्तो जिज्ञासुरर्थार्थी ज्ञानी च भरतर्षभ ॥

(Chapter 7 Sloka16)

The four types of devotees are Aarta, Artharthi, Jijnasu, and Jnani.

**Aarta-** He is a person in distress, facing a crisis and is suffering; he then seeks God's help by doing special poojas, visiting temples, but never remembers Him when the crisis is over.

**Artharthi-** He is the one, who seeks 'Artha'; that is material benefits such as property, progeny, wealth etc. His prayers lasts until the desire is fulfilled.

These two types of devotees are considered inferior, since they seek God to get the inferior goals of human life—Artha and Kama. For them, God is a 'Sadhana', a means to fulfil certain desires.

The other two types of devotees, who are considered are:

**Jijnasu-** He is a person with (jnatum iccha) a desire to know who is the Lord, His nature etc. For this devotee, the Lord is a goal and so seeks 'Moksha' or 'Liberation'. To this end, he seeks good health and favorable surroundings to get gnana (wisdom) and vairagya i.e. free from longing ('Gnana vairagya sidhyartham')

**Jnani-** For a 'Jnani' devotee, Bhagavan is neither a means nor an end; he has nothing to seek. He has realised that the Lord is not separated from his own self. He is not outside, but He resides in himself and he acknowledges that his own nature and Bhagavan's nature are one and the same. Lord Krishna declares in Bhagvad Gita that such a devotee is "Himself".

## Yoga-A way of life

उदाराः सर्व एवैते ज्ञानीत्वात्मैव मे मतम् ।

आस्थितः स हि युक्तात्मा मामेवानुत्तमां गतिम् ॥

(Chapter 7, Sloka 18)

It should be the endeavour of a devotee to progressively advance from Arta type to ultimately become a ‘*Jnani*’ devotee. Just as parents expect a child to give up play with balloons, toys and craze for cookies as the child grows, so also Bhagavan expects us to mature spiritually. Among the four principal goals- Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha- one may seek artha and kama upto the age of 50 or 55 years; later, one should seek moksha. By becoming a ‘*Jnani devotee*’, one becomes nearest and dearest to Him; hence, there can be no doubt that ‘*Jnani*’ devotee must be our goal. The life’s journey should pass the posts of an ‘*Aarta*’, ‘*Artharathi*’, ‘*Jijnasu*’ and finally ‘*Jnani*’ devotee.

Implicit in any form of prayer, which runs as an undercurrent, so to say, is an invocation to two unknown factors- ‘*Kala*’ (time) and ‘*Iswara*’. Despite our best efforts, unless the time is favorable, we may not get the expected results. For instance, a farmer growing seeds in the Summer is sure to be disappointed with the yield. Secondly, we are unaware of the Iswara’s order. We need God’s grace. We tap these two factors through our prayers.

It must, however, be noted that prayer does not ensure total success. It dilutes the intensity of the invisible obstacles arising from health, finance, surroundings or even family members. We, the humans, must accept our limitations; accept the existence of God, the Creator, and the Almighty, who is omnipotent and omniscient.

We should develop dedication and devotion; or else, the future will become more miserable. We would become mentally

## Yoga-A way of life

and physically weaker. Prayer in any form must be continued, even when faced with failures.

### AN OVERVIEW OF PATANJALI YOGA SUTRAS

ACCORDING to Patanjali Maharshi, the aim of every spiritual seeker is to attain Peace or Ananda, by following the disciplines prescribed by our *Shastras*. Just as a river eventually joins the ocean, every individual who has come from the Total-Self (Almighty), must ultimately merge with the Total Self. Once this happens, there is no insecurity, unhappiness, worry and anxiety but total joy. One of the best means or *sadhanas* to achieve this is by practising Ashtanga Yoga, which has been prescribed by Lord Krishna, Shankaracharya, Vyasa Bhagavan, Swami Vidhyaranya and others. In the 6<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Bhagvad Gita, Lord Krishna has mentioned about the benefits of Yoga. It is for these reasons that Patanjali Maharshi codified these sutras for the benefit of the mankind.

### Misconceptions about Yoga

- The prevalent misconception about Yoga is that it takes an individual deep into the sub-conscious, which ultimately leads to moksha or self realization. This is a wrong concept. One must understand that Ashtanga Yoga only qualifies a person to study the scriptures, which leads one to *moksha*. Yoga is only a pre-requisite that helps the spiritual seeker to have healthy sense organs, a subtle mind and a sharp intellect, so that the study of *Vedanta* is a walk over or an easy task. Therefore, it should be understood that Yoga is only a technique to discipline the body-mind complex and a means to attain self knowledge through a competent teacher.
- Today, Yoga has become the talk of the day and is practised by people irrespective of caste, creed,

## Yoga-A way of life

language and nationality. It has made headway in all fields because of its multi-fold benefits. But one must remember that the sole purpose of practising Yoga is for physical, mental, spiritual health, so that the body is fit to accept higher knowledge, which is necessary to attain *Self knowledge*. Any other purpose apart from this makes Yoga gymnastics or aerobics, and an injustice to the Lord and Patanjali Maharshi who codified the Yoga Shastras.

Patanjali has given the Yoga Shastra in a sutra format. Sutra is a short message, which has an elaborate meaning on analysis. He only gives the nature of each sutra and the characteristics. In addition, to know the value of a sutra, it has to be experimented on one's own body and mind, which serves as a laboratory. There are altogether four chapters in Ashtanga Yoga—Samadhi Pada, Sadhana Pada, Vibhuthi Pada and Kaivalya Pada. Here, we will discuss only the Sadhana *Pada* in brief.

### Ashtanga Yoga or The Eight-Limbed Yoga

Patanjali Maharshi gave eight steps to prepare the seeker to receive the spiritual knowledge from a learned teacher. At first, he emphasizes on values; those are the 10 Commandments which are universal and personal.

#### Sutra 2.29

यम-नियमासन - प्राणायाम - प्रत्याहार - धाराण-ध्यान- ।  
समाधयोऽष्टाङ्गानि ॥

**The eight steps of Ashtanga Yoga are:**

1. Yama (*Don'ts*)
2. Niyama (*Dos*)

## Yoga-A way of life

3. Asana (*Posture*)
4. Pranayama (*Breathing Regulation* )
5. Pratyahara (*Regulation of Sense organs*)
6. Dharana (*Mind Regulation*)
7. Dhyana (*Meditation*)
8. Samadhi (*Absorption*)

Enumerated below are Yamas (*values that are universal in nature*), Niyamas (*values that are personal in nature*) and their benefits for attainment of physical and mental health.

Patanjali has foreseen that when one follows Yamas and Niyamas, obstacles may arise in the mind.

- **When such thoughts arise, what should a person do?**

One should follow the counter thoughts, in order to negate such thoughts

- **Causes for people to violate the Yamas and Niyamas**

Greediness, anger and delusion

Our *Puranas* and *Shastras* have clearly stated that whatever we do, we reap the consequences later in life. Therefore one must consciously keep away from wrong actions

### **Yamas: (Dont's)**

#### **Sutra 2.30**

अहिंसा-सत्यास्तेय-ब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रह यमाः ।

Yamas are the first limb of Ashtanga Yoga and they are things that we should avoid doing in order to reach the Ultimate Goal in life. These are universal values and if violated it would



## Yoga-A way of life

affect a lot of people. These values need to be practised **by all, at all times, at all places and with all species.**

### Yamas are five in number

1. Ahimsa (*non-violence*)
2. Satyam (*avoidance of lies*)
3. Asteyam (*non-stealing*)
4. Brahmacharyam (*celibacy*)
5. Aparigraham (*non-possessiveness*)

### A) AHIMSA (NON-VIOLENCE)

It means to abstain from hurting others - physically, verbally or mentally. Patanjali Maharshi clearly states that this value can be deviated only in a battlefield and not otherwise. Even finding fault with others or seeing errors in others or listening to criticism are considered gross violation of this value. Besides, we should develop friendship and good attitude towards all human beings. We can implement these values when the value of the value is known to us.

### Benefits of practising Ahimsa

#### Sutra 2.35

अहिंसाप्रतिष्ठायां तत्सन्निधौ वैरत्यागः ।

By practising ahimsa, one becomes selfless, friendly and has a positive attitude in life, which is essential for a healthy body-mind complex.

Those who follow non-violence for a length of time, their environment would be free from any kind of enmity. There is an instance of how Angulimala became a disciple of Buddha, on entering the area where Buddha resided.

## Yoga-A way of life

However, one must bear in mind that the values must be completely ingrained and practising them should become as natural as breathing.

### B) SATYAM (AVOIDANCE OF LIES)

सत्यं प्रूयात् प्रियं ब्रूयात् न ब्रूयात् सत्यमप्रियम् ।  
प्रियं च नानृतं ब्रूयात् एषो धर्म सनातनः ॥

The old adage '*Truth alone triumphs*' holds well even today. It means speak truth, speak pleasant truth, never speak lies, even though it is pleasant. Therefore one must follow the value of speaking truth. That's the reason, why doctors never reveal unpleasant truth, however critical the disease may be.

### Benefits of following Satyam

#### Sutra 2.36

सत्यप्रतिष्ठायां क्रियाफलाश्रयत्वम् ।

When a person follows truth in words and action, in the long run whatever that person speaks turn out to be true. That's why the words of great people come true.

### C) ASTEYAM (NON-STEALING)

It means not to steal or accumulate wealth, by cheating others. In addition, even illegitimate way of earning wealth, evading taxes, claiming public property or resources from the Earth etc., come under Asteyam. Unlike ancient times, today, kith and kin fight over property in the court, which is a painful state of affair. It is a pleasure to imagine an ideal state, where there is no threat to self, life, money or property.

### Benefits of following Asteyam

#### Sutra 2.38

अस्तेयप्रतिष्ठायां सर्वरत्नोपस्थानम् ।

## Yoga-A way of life

If a person follows Asteyam for at least twelve years, the person gets liberated from the greed and it is to such a person that all valuables and wealth come spontaneously.

In addition, whatever that is best in the universe will manifest in front of such a kind of person, who utilizes it for the happiness of the society at large.

### **D) BRAHMACHARYAM (CELIBACY)**

Avoidance of illegitimate relationship with the opposite sex is called celibacy. One should know that even touching, looking, playing, praising and having lustful thoughts of the opposite sex goes against the principle of Brahmacharya. *Vedas* clearly elaborate the concept of *grihastashrama* (a householder), wherein a husband and wife share a conjugal relationship not based on lust, but for the spread of dharma. Children born out of such a relationship, work for the propagation of dharma and they too follow the same trend. Therefore, it is important that youngsters be enlightened on such values, so that they learn to respect a man-woman relationship, which is pure and beyond lust.

Secondly, in order to practise celibacy, a spiritual seeker should refrain from eating certain food, that evokes passion and unwinds all rules and regulations. All kinds of food with spicy ingredients, tamarind, garlic and meat must be totally avoided. Even some kinds of literature and pictures increase lustful thoughts and provoke illegitimate relationships. These must be totally kept away, as they are hindrances for human well-being

Thirdly, even friends who have illegitimate relationship with the opposite sex are to be dropped like a hot potato, as one indirectly becomes a part of the wrong action, by just being a silent spectator. It must be finally clearly understood that over-

## Yoga-A way of life

indulgence in sensual pleasures is *abrahmacharyam* and that moderate, legitimate relationship will not disturb brahmacharyam.

### Benefits of following Brahmacharyam

#### Sutra 2.38

ब्रह्मचर्यप्रतिष्ठायां वीर्यलाभः ॥

People, who follow celibacy, will have healthy sense organs and such persons can do things, which ordinary people cannot do. We have examples in our *puranas* like Agastya Maharshi drinking the whole ocean, and Hanuman crossing the ocean and lifting the Sanjivini Mountain in the left hand.

People, who follow celibacy, will have a radiance (*Tejas*) that glows through the eyes and body.

It aids in the attainment of Liberation

### E) APARIGRAHA (NON-POSSESSIVENESS)

It means not to accumulate things such as wealth and property for selfish ends. It must be understood that people can accumulate wealth/things for their need and not for their greed. Therefore, it is advised that a lot of donations to be given to people and institutions for a good cause, so that wealth is not accumulated in the hands of one person.

### Benefits of following Aparigraha

#### Sutra 2.39

आपरिग्रहस्थैर्ये जन्मकथन्तासंबोधः ॥

Patanjali says that those people who firmly follow *Aparigraha*, will be able to remember their past, present and future life, which will set them to enquire about the real nature.

## **Yoga-A way of life**

They lose interest in the worldly objects, as they are insignificant in front of the highest Knowledge.

It is essential to know that when people follow these constraints uniformly, it can be termed as a Great Vow (*Mahavratam*).

### **Niyamas: (Disciplines to be followed)**

Niyamas are the second limb of Ashtanga Yoga and they are the 'do's to be followed in order to reach the ultimate goal in life. In addition, Niyamas are personal or social conduct, which affects only that person who violates it.

#### **Niyamas are five in number**

1. Soucha (*Cleanliness*)
2. Santosha (*Contentment*)
3. Tapas(*Austerity*)
4. Swadhyaya (*Self-Study*)
5. Ishwara Pranidhana (*Surrender to God*)

#### **a) SOUCHA (*Cleanliness, Purity at Physical, Mental and Verbal levels*)**

This refers to cleanliness of the body, clothes and surrounding. It is mandatory for spiritual seekers to keep his/her surroundings clean and take bath twice a day. This will keep them well organized to receive the highest knowledge, which will make their life meaningful and purposeful. Those, who do not care for external cleanliness and orderliness, cannot acquire internal purity.

Our *Shastras* glorify the body and put forth its merits; thus it commands us to keep it healthy under all circumstances. At

## Yoga-A way of life

the same time, in some places, it criticizes the demerits of the body also. By recognizing these two extremes, intelligent people will not get attached to the body or develop false identification, which leads to over-indulgence in sense pleasures. By doing so, it will ultimately lead them to develop dispassion towards the body.

### Benefits of following the external cleanliness

#### Sutra 2.40

शौचात्स्वाङ्गजुगुप्सा परैरसंसर्गः ॥

- By regular cleaning, care and attention towards one's own body, he will come to know the defects and limitations of his body.
- Slowly he develops dispassion towards it; as a consequence, he drops his passion to have an association with others for sense pleasures.

### Internal Cleanliness

Internal cleanliness or purity of mind is also as important as external cleanliness. Apart from this, internal cleanliness also means to earn a livelihood in a legitimate way. Even pure thoughts and good behaviour come under internal cleanliness.

### Four-fold benefits of following the internal cleanliness

#### Sutra 2.41

सत्त्वशुद्धि-सौमनस्यैकाग्रेन्द्रियजयात्मदर्शन  
योग्यत्वानि च ॥

- Purity of mind
- Calmness of the mind

## Yoga-A way of life

- A focused mind
- Internal joy

Control of all the senses also aids in following celibacy. Always remember the saying, ‘*Cleanliness is next to Godliness*’.

### b) SANTOSHA (Contentment, cheerfulness)

It means to perform one’s duty with contentment. It is vital to know that by being cheerful (*internally and externally*) at all times, people can reap immense benefits. It is essential that one should not look down upon oneself, instead have a healthy right attitude, and in other words **count your blessings** all the time.

### Benefits of following Santosha

#### Sutra 2.42

सन्तोषादनुत्तमः सुखलाभः ॥

### By practising santosha, people are assured of the following:

- The highest happiness both internally and externally
- Becoming content with what they possess
- Not craving for anything that would provide temporary happiness
- Developing a congenial environment free from all negativities.

### c) TAPAS (Austerity)

Our Vedas have prescribed different rules and regulations for different people at different levels of life. ‘*Tapas*’ means willful self-denial of certain pleasure at the body and mental level by performing certain rituals for the removal of laziness and impurities of the body. By doing so, the body becomes healthier, as internal purity takes place.

## Benefits of Tapas

### Sutra 2.43

कायेन्द्रियसिद्धिरशुद्धिक्षयात्तपसः ॥

#### ***Kaya Siddhi* benefits:**

- By following austerity, one can toughen his or her own physical body. Improving the physical strength and stamina is good for oneself as well as for the society also.

#### ***Indriya Siddhi* benefits:**

- Sense organs become powerful and a person can remain without food and water for a day
- People can convert any dis-advantage as an advantage and can always maintain cheerfulness and equilibrium.
- People through reasoning develop clarity in thought and attain internal bliss (*Samadhi*) at a very early age, as nothing perturbs them
- Their over-all personality improves tremendously.

#### **d) SWADHYAYA (Study of Scriptures)**

Swadhyaya means study of scriptures of one's own religion. It also means thorough understanding of the meaning of the scriptures.

There are different ways to do swadhyaya:

- Nama japa or chanting a name of God repeatedly, so that finally it keeps ringing at the sub-conscious level.
- Chanting the slokas repeatedly will help the mind to be occupied meaningfully.



## Yoga-A way of life

- Chanting the name of your favourite deity daily becomes a part of your routine, over a period of time

### Benefits of Swadhyaya

#### Sutra 2.44

स्वाध्यायादिष्टदेवतासम्प्रयोगः ॥

- People tend to dis-associate themselves from worries, as they are associated with the name of a Lord in the conscious and sub-conscious level
- As people believe in the guiding hands of the Lord at all times, they can develop a strong faith and confidence in him.
- One can develop a steady, focused mind, which can help for meditation.
- The impurities of the body and mind will go away
- People learn to surrender to the Will of the Lord and the final absorption happens automatically.

It is strongly recommended that *Swadhyaya* should begin at an early age, so that people start on their spiritual pursuit very early in life. We have references in our religious texts about Prahalad, Druva, Nachiketa and many others, who started Swadhyaya at a very early stage in life and got blessed by God.

#### e) ISHVARA PRANIDHANAM (Surrender to God)

#### Sutra 2.45

समाधिसिद्धिरीश्वरप्रणिधानात् ॥

This means total surrender to the Lord, without apprehension. While performing any action, one should have an attitude of making an offering to God and while receiving the result, one should welcome it as God's gift. This is called

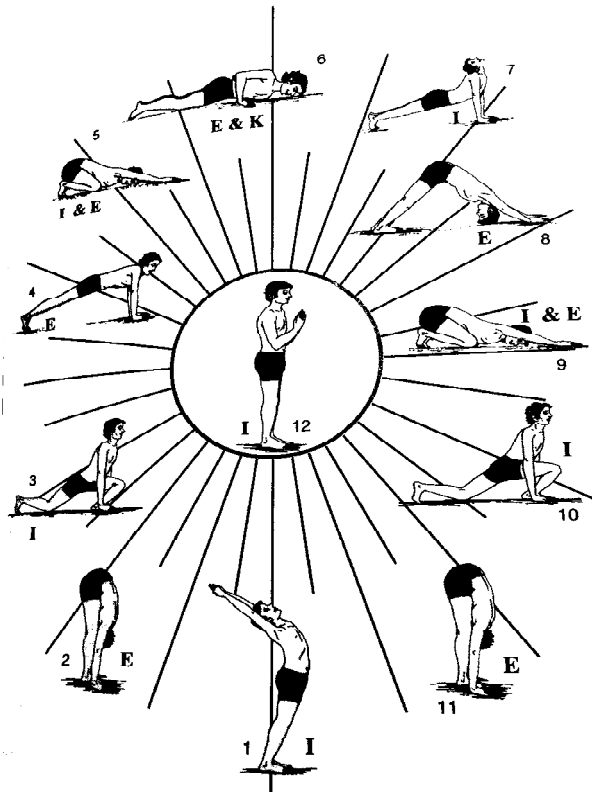
## Yoga-A way of life

Karma yoga. Absorption (*Samadhi*) is possible for the spiritual seeker, who has total faith in the Lord's teachings. . The culmination of Dhyanam is Samadhi.

Some people have expressed their doubt whether Ishvara Pranidhanam alone is sufficient to attain Samadhi. It should be clear that only by following **all** the Niyamas and Yamas can one reach the final goal. Patanjali Maharshi pointed out the Ten Commandments with a purpose and there can be no short cut in implementing them.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF SURYANAMASKAR

Suryanamaskara is a dynamic exercise, which is a mixture of asanas and pranayama that rejuvenates the entire body.



## Spiritual significance of the worship of the Sun

Sun is the centre of the universe and is considered to be the source of life on planet Earth. Without the Sun, one cannot imagine of existence at all. Hence from time immemorial, the Sun has been revered as a deity and worshipped. Suryanasmakara is a salutation to this powerful celestial body, around which other planets revolve and take light and heat from it. It is believed that whoever worships Lord Surya is bound to have a dynamic personality, as He rejuvenates life and makes one feel young, agile, brilliant and healthy.

In addition, in Hindu philosophy, Surya upasana (*meditation*) is prescribed in the scriptures, as Lord Krishna Himself had given the scriptural teachings to Lord Sun. This has reference in the Bhagvad Gita (Chapter IV). Therefore one needs the blessings of Lord Surya to gain a subtle intellect, to understand the ultimate truth of the Lord.

इमं विवस्वते योगं प्रोक्तवानऽहमयम् ।

विवस्वान्मनवे प्राहमनुरिक्ष्वाकवेऽब्रवीत् ॥ (B. G. 4.1)

Further, upasana means invoking the superior on inferior objects. In this context, we need to invoke Lord Surya in the solar disc, which is the media in which he resides. According to the scriptures, all spiritual seekers travel to higher worlds through the process called *Shukla Gati*.

Another reason why Hindus worship Lord Sun is that it is believed that the prayer *Aditya Hridayam* (*which is in praise of Lord Sun*) was given by Agastya Rishi to Lord Rama at the time of war, to gain victory over Ravana. By chanting this prayer, Rama was easily able to kill his opponent in the battle-field.

## **Yoga-A way of life**

In addition, the Sun and the Moon are visualized as the two eyes of the Universal form of the Lord and therefore they are revered.

Besides, in the Vedas, Lord Surya finds a mention in most of the portions, as he helps the spiritual seekers to attain the ultimate truth as He himself imparts the highest knowledge.

Also, Hindus chant the Gayatri mantra, which is known as Savitri Mantra, in which people invoke Lord Savita or Lord Surya to gain physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual health.

Therefore, there is a strong spiritual footing as to why Lord Surya has to be worshipped and Suryanamaskara is one of the best ways to gain His blessings to lead a healthy and spiritual life on this earth.

### **Scientific significance**

Firstly, it is a known fact that the Sun sustains life on Earth. It is scientifically proved that plants and organisms, with no exception to human beings need the Sun for their survival. In fact, the ecological balance is maintained because of the Sun.

Secondly, the hydrological cycle continues in all seasons, without which we wouldn't get rains. And if the rains fail we would not get any grains, vegetables and fruits that are essential for our growth and health. The hydrological cycle continues throughout the day, just as our breath and the credit goes to the Sun. So we need to consider the Sun as a visual God, who enables this basic survival on Earth. With this attitude, we worship Him for the benefit of the whole humanity.

Thirdly, the seasons of the year come in punctually at the right time, because of the Sun. They bring monsoons, which are very much needed for the nourishment of the Earth and for the water-bodies to replenish with water. People around the globe

## **Yoga-A way of life**

experience the different seasons and get to see the seasonal birds, fruits, vegetables and the changing flora, because of the Sun.

Why then should we not revere this celestial body as a God and offer our salutations to Him?

### **Cultural significance**

Our Indian culture has a lot of values that we learn from nature. In the past, elders used to get up early, take a bath and do Suryanamaskara, as they consider Him as a Lord, who bestows all good things on this Earth. We need to ponder, if the present generation follows this culture for the well-being of oneself and for the whole humanity in large. Why is it that people fail to follow the footsteps of our ancestors in such matters, which undoubtedly bestow good results?

It is in our culture to show gratitude to all those, who help us. Then it goes without saying that we need to show gratitude to the Sun, who provides the life-force for the survival of all creatures on this planet. We need to acknowledge the other forces of nature such as the rain and wind as well and salute them for their abundance.

### **Ethical significance**

The Sun is associated with values like punctuality, friendliness, sacrifice, impartiality etc., as it provides light and heat to all beings, without any discrimination. We see it punctually rise in the morning and set in the evening (*though it really doesn't*) and this should teach us lessons of punctuality. Therefore, when we do Suryanamaskara, we invoke the qualities ingrained in the Sun.

For instance, when we do Suryanamaskara, we chant the following mantra, for example

## Yoga-A way of life

ॐ मित्राय नमः

This indicates that He is the friend of the entire universe, as He provides light and heat to every creature.

ॐ पूष्णे नमः

This denotes that He nourishes all beings in this universe with His benevolence and grace. Etc....

### Health significance

There is no doubt that the worship of the Sun by doing Suryanamaskara has multi-fold benefits. Suryanamaskara combines yogasanas and pranayama and therefore if practised regularly, it can keep the body healthy and active, even in the old age. It is also a meditation process, as we concentrate on Lord Surya when we chant the mantra and visualize Him as we do the Suryanamaskara.

The mantra stimulates the nervous system, besides it tones up the respiratory, circulatory, digestive systems and makes them function normally.

In addition, while we chant the different names of Lord Surya, his specific qualities like friendship, devotion, energy, health, strength, lustre and vigour get instilled in us, as we identify ourselves with him, who is the epitome of these qualities.

To conclude, the worship of Lord Sun by doing Suryanamaskara for mental, physical and spiritual health is not a recent practice, but an ancient practice that has come down to us through sages. People have reaped immense benefits by this practice and it is for us to follow the path of our ancestors to reap the rich benefits and attain the blessings of the Lord Sun, who is a visual God, a sustainer of the whole universe.

## Yoga-A way of life

**Note:** The practice of Suryanamaskara is not provided here, as it is advisable for yoga students to take the guidance of a yoga- teacher in person, who can teach the correct postures of Suryanamaskara, by which they can see the change in their overall health over a period of time.

### YOGIC PRACTICES FOR COMPREHENSIVE GROWTH OF PERSONALITY

**Yogasanas provide good control of the limbs and the nervous system and prevent them from producing disturbances while following Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi. Yogasanas prepares the body to sit in meditation by providing the body with extraordinary well being. One can attain a focused mind and subtle intellect to understand the ultimate Truth.**

**An overview of the Asanas prescribed by Patanjali Maharshi**

#### **Definition of *Asana*:**

Asana means “*posture*” and Asana is the third limb or *anga* in Patanjali’s *Ashtanga Yoga*. After Yamas and Niyamas, ashtanga yoga of Patanjali speaks about Asanas (*discipline of the body*). Patanjali Mahrishi defines Asanas as “*sthiram sukam asanam*”. This means that the posture must be steady and comfortable. Each asana is to be done for a maximum time of 3 minutes, but sometimes people with better capacity can maintain the posture for 5 minutes also. Yogasanas provide good control of the limbs and the nervous system and prevent them from producing disturbances while following Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi. Yogasanas prepares the body to sit in meditation by providing the body with extraordinary well being. One can attain a focused mind and subtle intellect to understand the ultimate Truth.

## Yoga-A way of life

Yogasanas are designed to conserve the physical energies and transform them to subtle forms of mental energies. Asanas provide a means to develop an inner awareness, thus aiding in calming down the mind. Asanas practised is a stepping stone for mental, intellectual and spiritual health.

**Hints for practice:** It is important that one follows the hints given below, while doing the asanas: Slowness, Awareness, Synchronization and Relaxation.

- (a) **Slowness:** The asanas must be done in a slow manner, with a relaxed mind and body.
- (b) **Awareness:** While practising asanas, one has to maintain a presence of mind, which means “*to be aware of the inner changes of one’s own bodily movements and breathing*”.
- (c) **Synchronization:** The speed of the body- movement and breathing has to be synchronized.
- (d) **Relaxation:** One has to observe the relaxation of each part of the body, as they perform the asana.

### Ideal Time to practice Asanas:

The ideal time to do these asanas or postures is in the early hours between 4a.m.-8a.m. If one is not able to do it so early in the morning, one can choose to do these asanas any time between 4p.m-7 p.m

### Who should abstain from doing Asanas:

It is advisable that one must not do these asanas, if they are ill (*if one suffers from fever or has undergone a surgery*). It is only after a gap of six months after a surgery and consulting a doctor or a yoga therapist, should one begin doing the asanas



## Yoga-A way of life

again. For women, it is better to avoid practising these asanas during the monthly menstrual cycle.

### General benefits of doing Asanas:

Regular practice of yogasanas has an immense amount of therapeutic value. It helps to keep our body fit, controls cholesterol level, reduces weight, normalizes blood pressure, and improves the performance of the heart.

Physical fitness thus achieved reduces mental stress. Just as a doctor prescribes medicines along with some food restrictions, similarly to get the full benefit of asanas one can take to a yogic diet.

There are a number of asanas in standing, sitting, prone supine postures. There are classical balancing postures, which are useful to prevent and cure diseases (*if they are in the preliminary stage*). Another benefit of regular practice of these asanas can reduce the intake of medicines for those who are suffering from certain ailments. Asanas can also prevent the further aggravation of ailment. Apart from these, asanas add to the flexibility in the body, they improve the stamina and energy level in the body, provides good blood circulation and harmonizes the whole physical and mental. We begin with the standing postures that improve concentration and suppleness. As one practises these asanas, one will find the difference in one's health. Three important symptoms of good health are clearly visible when one starts regularly doing the asanas. They are **(1) good appetite (2) sound sleep (3) free motion**. A balanced and relaxed body allows the mind to take right decisions by which one can experience peace and happiness.

We can find asanas in the names of rishis like Mastyendrasan, in the names of animals and birds connected to

## Yoga-A way of life

mythology like Matsyasan, Kurmasan, Garudasan, Bhujangasan, Makarasan, Mayurasan, Kapotasan, etc.

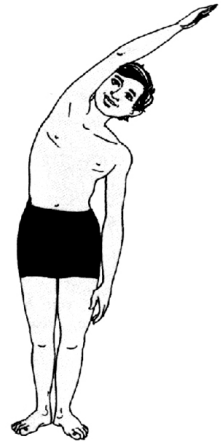
### AN OVERVIEW OF THE ASANAS PRESCRIBED BY SAGE PATANJALI

We have already discussed a few Standing asanas. Here, you will know more about Sitting asanas that are beneficial to prevent the abdominal fat, menstrual disorders and other respiratory and psycho-somatic problems.

#### Standing Asanas:

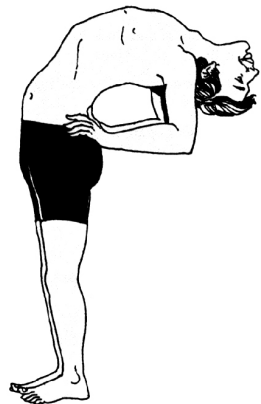
##### I Ardha Kati Chakrasana (Lateral Arc Posture) Benefits

- This asana provides a good flexibility to the spine and removes discomfort, while bending.
- It also improves the function of the liver.
- It helps to relieve the frozen shoulder



##### II Ardhachakrasana (Half-wheel posture) Benefits

- Brings flexibility to the spine
- Stimulates the spinal nerves, mainly optic nerve
- Enhances blood circulation to the head
- It helps to activate the optic nerve, by which we get good eye vision
- It helps to relieve spondylosis, expands the lung capacity.



## Yoga-A way of life

### III Pada Hastasana (Forward Bending Posture) Benefits

- It brings more flexibility in the spine
- Good blood circulation in the head region
- It activates all the inner organs at abdominal level



#### Precautions

This asana should not be done by those, who suffer from severe back pain.

#### 1. Padmasana ( The Lotus Pose)

It is a meditative posture.

##### Benefits:

It maintains balanced flow of energy throughout the body and calms down the mind. It is one of the most popular well known asana, which reminds us of our ancient Rishis.



#### 2. Ushtrasana (Camel posture) Benefits:

This asana helps to bring flexibility to the spine. It prevents spondylosis, back pain, breathing problem, arthritis, sciatica, gastric trouble, asthma. It cures long-sight and short-sight problems.

**Caution:** Hernia patients should avoid practising this asana.



## COUNTER POSTURE

### 3. Paschimottanasana (Posterior Bending)

'Pascima' means 'posterior' and 'tana' means 'stretch'. In the final position, the entire posterior parts from the toes to the neck are stretched.

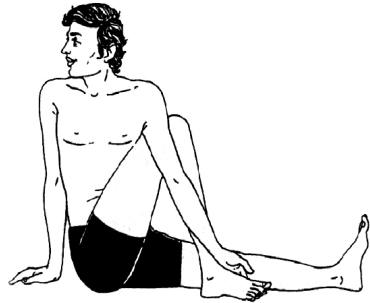


**Benefits:** It stretches and tones up the entire posterior and frontal abdominal muscles. It slims and trims the body in general. Liver, Pancreas, Intestines and Gastric fire are activated. It helps to increase height in adolescents and useful in constipation, seminal weaknesses, piles, diabetes and digestive disorders. It reduces the fat in the abdomen.

**Caution:** Those with Blood pressure, Spondylosis and chronic constipation should avoid.

### 4. Vakrasana (Twist posture)

'Vakra' means 'twist'. The final position of the posture the body will be in a twisted position.



**Benefits:** Useful for the treatment of constipation, diabetes, kidney problem, rheumatism of back muscle. It removes the hunch back.

**Caution:** Hernia patients should avoid.

### 5. Ardha Matsyendrasana (The half twist posture)

*Ardha* means *half*. Matsyendra is a yogi. Poorna Matsyendrasana is very difficult to practise for common

## Yoga-A way of life

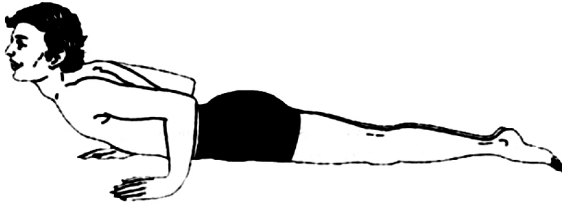
people. Therefore we are giving Ardha Matsyendrasana, which is generally practised by all people.

**Benefits:** This asana is mainly prescribed to activate the Pancreas, to produce sufficient insulin. Those who cannot do this asana, can initially do Vakrasana.



## PRONE POSTURES

### 1. Bhujangasana (Serpent posture)

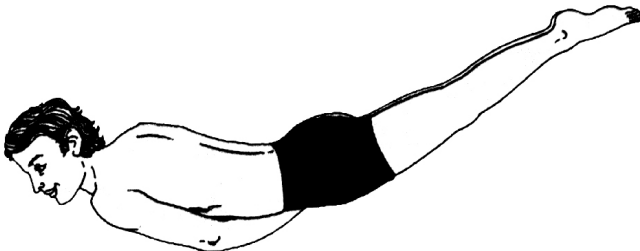


‘*Bhujanga*’ means ‘*serpent*’. In the final posture, the body looks like a serpent, when it raises its hood.

**Benefits:** It is very helpful to prevent spondylosis, back pain, asthma, and eye problems. It tones up the spinal nerves.

**Caution:** Hernia patients, and uterus prolapsed women should avoid to do this asana.

### 2. Salabhasana (Locust posture)



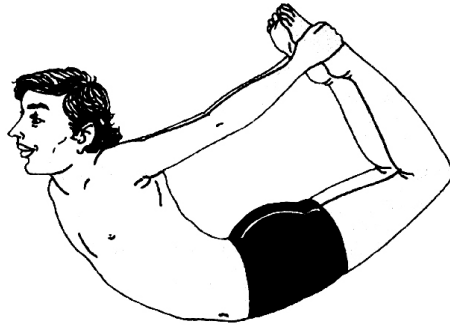
## Yoga-A way of life

*Salabha* is the name of an insect called locust. In the final posture, the body looks like a locust.

**Benefits:** It strengthens the thigh and calf muscles, useful in combating constipation, gastritis and diabetes, corrects the lumbar region and activates the pancreas. For women, it prevents pre-menstrual pains.

**Caution:** Those suffering from urinary tract disorder, Hernia, hypertension and heart problem should avoid

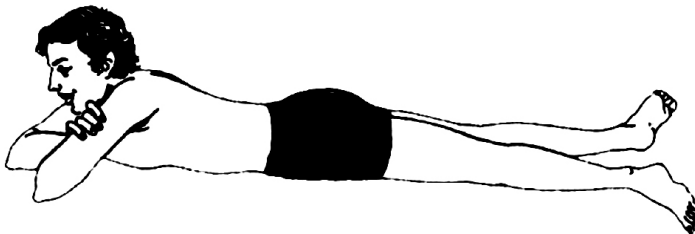
### 3. Dhanurasana (Bow Posture)



*Dhanur* means *bow*. In the final posture, the body looks like a bow.

**Benefits:** It is good for breathing problems, back ache, diabetes, gastro-intestinal problem and digestion. Those suffering from Hernia and hyper-tension should avoid doing this asana.

### 4. Makarasan (Crocodile posture)



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*Makara* means *crocodile*. In the final posture, the body looks like a crocodile.

**Benefits:** It gives relaxation to the entire body, like Savasana. This posture is useful for curing many ailments caused by hyper-tension, insomnia etc.

**It is very important that one learns these asanas from a learned and competent teacher, who practises yoga. The asanas should be practised for a length of time, regularly every day, so that the real benefits can be experienced in the course of time.**

Now you will know about Supine postures that can reduce abdominal fat, make your body feel light and prevent many gastro-intestinal, respiratory and psychosomatic problems.

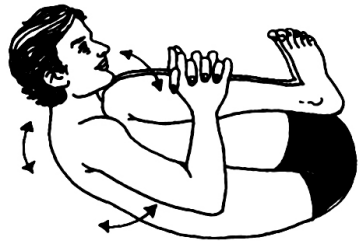
### Pavanamuktasana

#### **Benefits:**

It removes gastro-intestinal problems and reduces abdominal fat.

#### **Caution:**

Those who suffer from Disc prolapse, spondylosis, can avoid this asana.



### Sarvangasana

Shoulder Standing Posture. It is considered the Queen of asanas

#### **Benefits:**

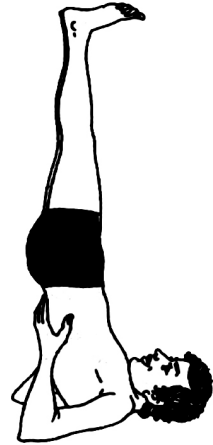
This asana prevents thyroid, hernia, diabetes and many psychosomatic illnesses. It also maintains healthy thyroid and keeps the body healthy. As the brain gets sufficient

## Yoga-A way of life

supply of blood, the memory develops, concentration improves, maintaining the mental balance. It is a good treatment for varicose veins, piles, constipation and menstrual disorders.

### Caution:

Those who are suffering from spondylosis back-pain, blood pressure and heart problem should avoid doing this asana.



### Matsyasana (*counter posture for Sarvangasana*)



### Benefits:

It activates the leg muscles and the spine. It is a good therapeutic treatment for people with diabetes and respiratory problems. The body becomes light, relaxed and fresh.

Those who cannot do in Padmasana can stretch their legs and perform this asana.

### Chakrasana

#### Benefits:

This is a very powerful back-bending asana, which brings flexibility to the spine and tones up the biceps and calf



## Yoga-A way of life

muscles. It also activates the whole nervous system and makes the body feel light and agile.



### **Halasana ( counter posture for Chakrasana)**

#### **Benefits :**

It tones up the neck region, as it enables sufficient blood-flow to this region and also to the chest. It stretches the back muscles, vertebrae and lumbar nerves, and brings flexibility to the spine.



The method to do these asanas is not provided, as it is very essential to learn these asanas from a competent yoga teacher. Practise them in class and then do them independently at home regularly, so that you can see the benefits for yourself over a period of time.

### **Yoga Nidra- Shavasana or Shanti asana (Deep Relaxation Technique-DRT)**

The Deep Relaxation Technique (*DRT*) or otherwise called Shavasana or Shanti asana is helpful to relax the body that is tensed with the daily chores and activities at home and at work-place. '*Shava*' means '*corpse*', so in this asana, we lie down

## Yoga-A way of life

without any movement and focus on our breath in order to get relaxed. This, if practised regularly after the guidance from a competent yoga teacher, will help you calm down the mind and body, and is sure to rejuvenate your health.

### Deep Relaxation Technique is done in four phases:

Phase I -Observation of your breathing

Phase II- Part by part relaxation of your body

Phase III -‘*Akaara*’ chanting at abdominal level, ‘*Ukaara*’ chanting at chest level, and then ‘*Makaara*’ chanting at forehead level.

*(Phases II and III can be done together)*

Phase IV-Visualization and Expansion

Each phase can be practised for a minimum of ten minutes. After completing the above mentioned asanas, if one can practise this Shavasana for minimum twenty to thirty minutes, then that will be equal to six hours of sleep; the body can be free from all psychosomatic ailments.

## PRANAYAMA, REGULATION OF BREATH

Proper breathing can bring more oxygen to the blood and the brain. Pranayama goes hand in hand with the Asanas. The union of these two yogic principles is considered as the highest form of purification and self-discipline, covering both mind and body.

### Prayer

प्राणस्येदं वशे सर्वं  
त्रिदिवे यत् प्रतिष्ठितम् ।  
मातेव पुत्रान् रक्षस्व  
श्रीश्च प्रज्ञश्च विधेहि नैति ॥

*(Pra.Upa 2.13)*

## Yoga-A way of life

“Whatever exists in the three worlds, is all under the control of Prana. Oh Prana! protect us as a mother protects her sons; give us affluence and intelligence”.

First four steps of Ashtanga Yoga is called Hatha Yoga; the second four steps are called Rajayoga. That is why sometimes Ashtanga Yoga is called Hatha Yoga. The first four steps (*Yama, Niyama, Asana and Pranayama*) deal with external personality; the other four steps (*Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi*) deal with internal personality. Ashtanga Yoga is a supportive cause, to control the mind.

Pranayama helps to control the mind like a bird, which is caught within a net. Prana serves like a net for the bird(mind). If the net is not there, then the bird will move all over; it will not stop by itself. With the net, the bird is incapacitated to go out.

### प्राणस्य आयामः प्राणायामः

‘Prana’ means breath, respiration, life, vitality, wind, energy or strength. ‘Ayama’ means length, expansion, stretching and restraint. Pranayama thus connotes expansion of breath and its control. This control is over all the functions of the breathing namely

1. Inhalation or inspiration, which is termed as Puraka, filling up.
2. Exhalation or expiration, which is called Rechaka, emptying the lungs
3. Retention or holding the breath, a state where there is neither inhalation nor exhalation, which is termed as Kumbhaka:

A Kumbha is a water pot, jar. A jar may be filled completely with air. There are two types of Kumbhaka:

## Yoga-A way of life

1. Breathing is suspended after inhalation (*Lungs filled with life-giving air*)
2. When breathing is suspended after all exhalation.

The first one is Antara Kumbhaka (*internal holding*) and the second one is Bahya Kumbhaka (*external holding*). While doing Pranayama, if we chant any mantra, it is known as Sagarbha Pranayama, as a remedy to destroy our sins. If we practise without mantra, it is known as Agarbha Pranayama. Emptying the whole of its illusion is the true Rechaka. The knowledge that I am Atma, The Self is the true Puraka and the steady sustenance of the mind on this conviction is the true Pranayama. Adi Sankaracharya, in his Aparokshanubhooti, refers to this as harmonizing the Pinda (*Micro*) individual self with the Brahmanda (*Macro*) Prana, Total Self or Universal Self.

Emotional excitement affects the rate of breathing equally; deliberate regulation of breathing checks your emotional excitement.

One of the most suitable forms of energy is air - Prana Vayu. This vital energy, which also pervades the human body is classified into five main categories, according to the various functions performed by the vital energy. They are known as Prana, Apana, Samana, Vyana, Udana.

1. **Prana** – Respiratory system, which moves in the region from nose up to your lungs and controls the respiration.
2. **Apana** – Excretory system, which moves in the sphere of lower abdomen and controls the function of eliminating urine and faeces (*motion*).
3. **Samana** – Digestive system, activates the gastric fire which helps in digestion.

## Yoga-A way of life

4. **Vyana** – Circulatory system which pervades the entire body and distributes the energy derived from breath and food.
5. **Udana** – Expulsory system, which dwells in the thoracic cavity and controls the intake of air and food. It is activated at the time of vomiting, hiccups and death.

### There are also five subsidiary vayus (air)

1. **Naga Vayu** relieves abdominal pressure, by belching
2. **Kurma Vayu**, which controls the movements of the eye-lids, to prevent foreign matter or too bright light entering into your eyes.
3. **Krikara Vayu**, which prevents the substances passing up the nasal passage, addresses the threat by making one sneeze or cough.
4. **Devadatta Vayu**, which provides the intake of extra oxygen when the person is tired by causing a yawn.
5. **Dananjaya Vayu**, which remains in the body even after death and sometimes bloats up the corpse.

अपाने जुह्वति प्राणं प्राणेऽपानं तथापरे ।

प्राणापानगति रुद्ध्वा प्राणायामपरायणाः ॥ (B. G. 4.29)

Lord Krishna, while enumerating different types of yajnas, considers this Pranayama as one type of yajna.

Ramana Maharshi writes in his Upadesa Saram thus:

वायु रोधना लीयते मनः ।

जाल पक्षिवदोध साधनम् ॥

## Yoga-A way of life

By restraining the Prana (*breathing*), the mind becomes absorbed or temporarily dissolved, just like a bird's movement is restrained by the net. Similarly our various thoughts are restrained for sometime and the thought- flutterings are temporarily suspended. When the restraining is cut, the bird flies back to its usual field of activity. In the same way, when Pranayama practice ends, the thoughts gurgle out and embrace their pet objects once again; finding more pleasure, they get into more problems. Therefore Pranayama has to be followed by the next step Pratyahara, sensory disciplines.

### Varieties of Pranayama and their benefits.

1. **Nadi suddhi** (*Alternate Nostril breathing*)

**Benefits** : Purification of nadis, lightness of body, glistening eyes, charming face, good appetite, prevents and cure migraine headache, prevents blood pressure and all other psychosomatic ailments.

2. **Sitali, Sitkari, Sadanta** (*Cooling effect pranayama*)

**Benefits:** It calms down the mind, prevents bleeding gums and foul smell in the mouth, good for eyes.

3. **Ujjai** (*Hissing pranayama*)

**Benefits** : Prevents blood pressure, gives melodious voice etc.

4. **Bhramari** (*Humming sound Pranayama*)

**Benefits:** It calms down the mind, good for voice culture, releases stress and tension.

All Pranayama practices are to be learnt, under the guidance of a competent teacher.

## PRATYAHARA, WITHDRAWAL OF SENSE ORGANS

**Our five sense organs of knowledge are like doors or entry gates, and five sense organs of action are like exit gates. They serve as instruments between the external world and the mind. Whether you like or not, sense organs disturb the mind. Pratyahara, withdrawal of sense organs, is the most important discipline to prepare oneself for meditation practice.**

The fifth limb of Ashtanga Yoga involves something, which is connected to our sense organs known as Pratyahara. This is the most important discipline to prepare oneself for meditation practice. Pratyahara means withdrawal of sense organs like ears, eyes, touch, taste, smell, speech etc. We have got five sense organs of knowledge and five sense organs of action. Withdraw these sense organs from their respective sense objects like sound, forms, food etc. **Moderate and legitimate function of the sense organs will not harm a person.**

Pratyahara is defined by Patanjali as

स्वाविषया संप्रयोगे चित्त स्वरूपानुकार इवेन्द्रियाणां प्रत्याहारः ।  
(2.54 Sadhanapada)

Pratyahara or withdrawal is by which the senses do not associate with their own objects and imitate as it were, follow the nature of the mind.

By the practice of Pranayama, sensory discipline, the mind will get purified. A purified Satvic mind easily focuses on meditative object, by regular practice.

ततः परमा वश्यतेन्द्रियाणां

## Yoga-A way of life

Then you can attain supreme mastery over senses.

Pratyahara is known by another name as **दमः**. Mind control is called **शमः**.

The nature of the sense organs is to go out and have connection with the objects. When these senses are regulated, and withdrawn inwardly, they rest in the mind. The meaning is that, the mind doesn't come into contact with objects, sounds etc.

यदा संहरते चायं कूर्मोऽङ्गानीव सर्वशः ।

इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थभ्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ (B. G. 2. 58)

Lord Krishna equates this with the tortoise, which withdraws its limbs from all directions and protects its life from danger. This practice technically is known as Pratyahara.

Our five sense organs of knowledge are like doors or entry gates, and five sense organs of action are like exit gates. They serve as instruments between the external world and the mind. Whether you like or not, sense organs disturb the mind. If you compare the mind as a liquid, then the sense organs are like the churning rods. Discriminative knowledge is required to monitor or to check their outgoing nature.

Seeing objects is not a problem; but when I want to possess them, it leads to sorrow. Without them, my life is empty, which alone causes pain.

In the Kathopanishad, Lord Yama says to Nachiketas,

यच्छेद्वाङ्मनसी प्राज्ञस्तद्यच्छेज्ज्ञान आत्मनि ।



## Yoga-A way of life

A spiritual seeker should turn away his speech, sense organs etc from external objects.

स्पर्शान्कृत्वा बहिर्बाह्यांश्चक्षुश्चैवान्तरे भ्रुवोः । (B. G. 5.27)

Lord Krishna asks to keep external objects external, and never allow them to reside in our mind.

There is no aversion towards any sense objects.

In Aparokshanubhooti, Sankaracharya writes about the final culmination of Pratyahara thus: “May you see this entire universe as Supreme Consciousness (आत्म भाव). May your mind absorb in the Ultimate Truth”.

## DHARANA, CONCENTRATION OF MIND

**In Ashtanga Yoga, Sage Patanjali has stated Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi as the last three stages and these should be considered together. To engage the mind in a particular area is Dharana, for which certain preliminary preparations are necessary.**

DHARANA or Concentration, the sixth limb of Patanjali’s Ashtanga Yoga, comes under internal (*Antaranga*) Yoga.

देश बंध चित्तस्य धारणा ॥ (Yogasutra 3.1)

Dharana is fixing of the mind on one place/object, either external symbol, form or internal place in one’s own heart.

One can focus on any personal God, or on symbol connected to their Ishta Devata like Shiva, Vishnu and Devi represented by Linga, Saligrama, Flame etc respectively. One can choose to focus on Omkara, the Pranava Mantra.

## Why God? Why not other worldly objects?

A person in distress wants to relate to an alive being and not on inanimate things. He takes shelter on the lap of Iswara. Fixing our mind on a form of God is a wonderful approach, which our scriptures prescribe. We have 33 crores of gods; if you want, you can add one more. God is one, appearing in many forms. Whichever form you like to meditate upon, you can choose and concentrate.

### निकृष्ट वस्तुनि उत्कृष्ट भावना

One can invoke reverential attitude on inferior forms or symbols also, which are made out of wood, stone or metal etc. For example, on haridra-kumkum or turmeric powder, we invoke Lord Ganesha. This is similar to the National Flag symbolising one's own country, through which we show our reverence and patriotism.

To develop concentration, we can apply three steps: **Manasa pooja**, mentally worshipping the deity by offering flowers etc., **Manasa parayanam**, chanting some slokas or stothras mentally on the deity. **Manasa Japa**, mentally chanting the name of the deity repeatedly. Japa is a way of keeping the mind fully occupied. Ramana Maharshi said that our mind is like an elephant-trunk, which cannot remain steady even for a moment. When we give something to hold, it catches it and holds on to it. Similarly, we have to give a mantra to our mind to chant repeatedly. By regular practice of japa, our mind will become steady; then alone we can enter into actual meditation. Without proper focussing capacity, we cannot enter into the field of Dhyana. We require tremendous faith and devotion on that

## Yoga-A way of life

chosen deity and His mantra. In Dharana, there is an effort. Concentration always involves an internal adjustment.

Dharana is a preparatory step for Dhyana. There are eight steps to be observed, immediately before the practice of meditation.

### 1. Place :

शुचौ देशे प्रतिष्ठाप्य स्थिरमासनमात्मनः ॥ (B. G. 6.11)

One has to choose a clean place naturally which has got a spiritual, divine atmosphere or we can convert the place where we live, suitable for Dhyana.

2. **Time:** The ideal time for Dhyana is during early morning between 4 am and 6 am. Meditation practice time can be 10 minutes minimum to maximum 20 minutes.

### 3. Seat:

नात्युच्छ्रितं नातिनीचं चैलाजिनकुशोत्तरम् ।

(B. G. 6.11)

The seat we sit for meditation must be steady and firm, not too high or too low. Sit on a mat, which is not too hard or too soft.

4. **Body Posture:** One can sit either in Padmasana, Siddhasana, Vajrasana or in any comfortable posture.

समं कायशिरोग्रीवं धारयन्नचलं स्थिरः ।

(B. G. 6.13)

The body, head and neck should be in perpendicular position.

## Yoga-A way of life

### 5. Breathing observation: (Prana veekshanam)

प्राणापानौ समौ कृत्वा नासाभ्यन्तरचारिणौ । (B.G. 5.27)

Making even (equalised) the outgoing and incoming breath, that moves through the nostrils.

### 6. Position of sense organs:

सम्प्रेक्ष्य नासिकाग्रं स्वं दिशश्चानवलोकयन् । (B.G. 6.13)

Restraining all the sense organs from every side.

### 7. Mental Status:

मनः संयम्य मच्चित्तो युक्त आसीत् मत्परः । (B.G. 6.14)

*'With the mind fixed on Me, by controlling it through concentration'*

### 8. Intellectual level: One has to develop conviction, sincerity and commitment towards the practice of meditation at the intellectual level.

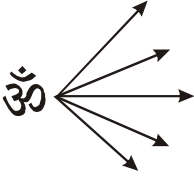
This is known as Dharana, focusing the mind on one chosen object. It prepares the mind to enter into actual meditation at deeper levels.

## DHYANA, THE ART OF MEDITATION

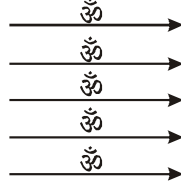
There is an unbroken thought-flow between the mind and the object of meditation.

In Meditation, mind is occupied meaningfully. It is not distracted, but holds steadily to the object of concentration. No other thoughts are entertained. Uni-directional thought-flow is Meditation.

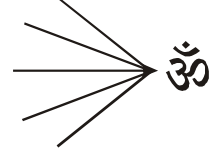
## Yoga-A way of life



**1st stage**  
Dharana  
(focussing)  
the mind on  
same object)



**2nd stage**  
Dhyana



**3rd stage**  
Samadhi  
(Absorption)

All these three put together is the nature of Meditation.

विजातीय प्रत्यय अनन्तारित सजातीय प्रत्यय प्रवाहः ध्यानं ।

The flow of similar thoughts without any dissimilar thoughts.

सगुण ब्रह्म विषयक मानस व्यापारः ।

The thought on Iswara with attributes (Saguna), in the initial stages is better. Meditation on Saguna Iswara is objective Meditation.

In focussing, holding of thought is involved. In retention, we keep on gazing by opening eyes or closing eyes. A meditator has to entertain his or her mind like the following:

यथा दीपो निवातस्थो नेङ्गते सोपमा स्मृता ।  
योगिनो यतचित्तस्य युञ्जतो योगमात्मनः ॥

*“As a light does not flicker in a windless place, such is stated to be the picture of the disciplined mind of the Yogi, practising meditation on God.”*

**Eka roopa Dhyanam**—One God in one form.

## Yoga-A way of life

**Vishwaroopa Dhyanam (Expansion meditation)** – One God in many forms; meditate on the whole universe. Vaster the vision smaller the ego, just as you add more water you don't feel the presence of salt. Similarly expansion meditation develops our thinking in a wider range, which means the reduction of selfishness.

Single thought-flow can be achieved like an oil-flow.

आज्यधारया स्त्रोतसा समम् ।  
सरलचिन्तनं विरलतः परम् ॥

(Upadesa-saram Sloka 7)

The divine name that we chant at the time of meditation is not merely a sound, but it is a force which helps you to overcome all destructive tendencies in your life. Meditation gives you physical, mental, as well as spiritual health.

### **Meditation on Brahman with attributes**

अथातः संप्रवक्ष्यामि ध्यानं संसार नाशनम् ।  
ऋतं सत्यं परं ब्रह्म सर्व संसार भेषजम् ॥

(Darshanopanishad 9.1)

*“Now I shall expound the meditation which removes the cycle of births and deaths. O great Yogi, one should with due respect, meditate on Isvara, the truth, the real, the ultimate Brahman, who is the medicine for the disease of worldly life.”*

For the infinite power, a form is given. We invoke the infinite Brahman in a given form, just as the whole country is invoked in the tricoulour flag. That infinite Brahman is named as GOD, who is the generator, operator and destroyer of this universe. One has to meditate upon 'formed' God or a symbol.

## Yoga-A way of life

### Contemplation or Vedantic Meditation

This is the final culmination of Meditation practice. Adi Sankaracharya says in his Aparokshanubhooti,

ब्रह्मैवाहमस्मीति सद्ब्रुत्या निरालंबतया स्थिति ।  
ध्यान शब्देन विख्याता परमानन्द दायिनी ॥

*“I am non-different from that infinite Brahman. I remain as Existent, Consciousness, Ananda principle without any other form or symbol.”*

Meditation on Nirguna (attributeless) Iswara is subjective Meditation or Atma Dhyanam, and it is meant for an advanced student, who has completed the study of Gita and Upanishads, under a competent teacher for a length of time.

### Obstacles at the time of doing Meditation

1. Sleep (laya)
2. Distraction (vikshepa)
3. Kashayam (स्तब्धी भाव). Stagnation or Blankness of the mind
4. Addiction to calmness (rasaasvaada)

Lack of proper sleep during night , physical tiredness due to over-work schedule and over-eating—these are the main reasons for getting sleep at the time of meditation.

Secondly, distraction of mind is due to emotional disturbance or pre-occupation of the mind with external objects.

### Remedy

1. Have sufficient sound sleep for 6 to 7 hours.
2. Have a satwic diet ( pure vegetarian).

## Yoga-A way of life

3. Reduce your working hours.
4. Lead a value- based life.
5. Maintain healthy relations with people.

Goudapadacharya says in his Mandukya karika,

लये संबोधयेच्चित्तं विक्षिप्तं शमयेत्पुनः ।

सकषायं विजानीयात् समप्राप्तं न चालयेत् ॥ (3.44)

*“When the mind tends to get sleep, keep it awake; bring back the distracted mind again and again when it moves around. Once the mind is established in the meditative object, may you not allow the mind to move.”*

## SAMADHI, THE ABSORPTION

### Final step of Ashtanga Yoga.

The general definition of Samadhi according to Patanjali:

तदेवार्थं मात्रनिभासं स्वरूप शून्यमिव समाधिः ।

(Patanjali Yoga Sutra 3.3)

*“The same (dhyana) is Samadhi when it shines with the object alone, as it were, devoid of itself.”*

Dharana (*focussing*), Dhyana (*attempt to retain, for a length of time*) and Samadhi (*absorption*), -these three come under one group.

In concentration or Dharana, there is a lot of effort involved. Successful Dharana leads to Dhyana; successful Dhyana for a period of time will lead to Samadhi.

Becoming one with the seen (object) is Samadhi.

सम्यक् अधीयते अस्मिन् इति समाधिः ।



## Yoga-A way of life

Absorption or Samadhi means

त्रयमेकत्र संयम । (Patanjali Yoga Sutra 3.4)

त्रयम् trayam = त्रिपुटी triputi = Triad

Meditator (subject) - ध्याता

Meditation (process) - ध्यानं

Object of Meditation - ध्येयं

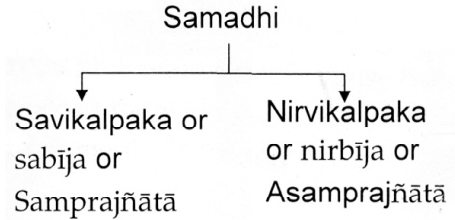
In this triad, effort is involved. It is called Savikalpaka Samadhi.

- Dharana** 1. Saguna (*with attributes*)  
2. Nirguna (*without attributes*)

- Dhyanam** 1. Upasana (*with attributes*)  
2. Contemplation (*without attributes*)

- Samadhi** 1. Savikalpaka (*with division*)  
2. Nirvikalpaka (*without division*)

The following chart gives two types of Samadhi as given by Patanjali



This absorption happens in one's daily life also, like, when a child is watching an ant, or when you are watching a movie, serial or cricket match etc. In Samadhi, the meditator is as good

## Yoga-A way of life

as lost; his sense organs, mind, intellect are completely absorbed, and they are no more in active state, but they are in totally passive condition. Temporary forgetfulness of Triad is known as absorption.

Eight limbs of yoga come under Sadhana, a means.

Nirvikalpaka Samadhi is the culmination in Yoga Sastra.

Patanjali Maharshi writes about Ashta Siddhies.

1. अणिमा-anima, 2. लघिमा-laghima, 3. महिमा- mahima, 4. गरिमा-garima, 5. प्राप्ति- Prapti, 6. प्रकाम्य-prakamya, 7. विशिष्य-visitvam, 8. ईशत्वं-isatvam.

तद्वैराग्यादपि दोषबीजक्षये कैवल्यम् (Patanjali Yoga Sutra 4.51)

By giving up even these powers, the seed of evil is destroyed and liberation follows.

**Yoga philosophy is vehemently against these mystic powers, because they mislead the seeker from the path of yoga. The goal of yoga is not the attainment of these miracles or powers, but union with God.**

One can see the influence of Advaita Vedanta, in the definition and description of Samadhi in Darshanopanishad

सोहं ब्रह्म न संसारी न मत्तोऽन्यः कदाचन ।

यदा फेन तरङ्गादि समुद्रादुत्थितं पुनः ॥

I am Brahman, not bound in worldly life. There is none other than myself at any time, just like the foam and waves etc, arising out of the ocean merge in the ocean again. The world merges in Me. Therefore, there is no separate mind and also the illusion of the world is not there.

## Yoga-A way of life

The miracle of life is Self knowledge. Other than Self-knowledge, all mystic powers are worthless and causing jealousy. They all belong to non-self (*Anatma*) plane, and they work in material plane only.

Adi Sankaracharya writes one full treatise, enumerating all miracles and he asks “*so what?*”

वह्नि जग्धो लाजवद्वा ततः किम् ।  
च्चेरु पाणाउधृतोवा ततः किम् ।  
येन स्वात्मा नैव साक्षात् कृतो भूत् ।

You may swallow fire, you may lift the Himalayas, you may fly in the air, so what..... You are in Self ignorance, until you attain Self knowledge. Therefore Yoga Samadhi is the beginning, not the end.

**Let the Yoga way of living become your own! Know yoga;  
know Peace!!**



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